

Book Review: Guattari Reframed

by Blog Admin

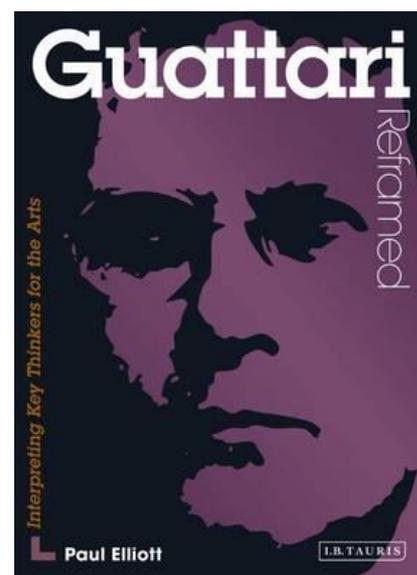
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Guattari Reframed presents a timely and urgent rehabilitation of one of the twentieth century's most engaged and engaging cultural philosophers. Best known as an activist and psychiatrist, Guattari's work is increasingly understood as both eerily prescient and vital in the context of contemporary culture. **Dafne Muntanyola-Saura** finds that this book usefully reassesses the major concepts developed throughout Guattari's writings, whilst using imaginative examples to invite the reader to transform their understanding of Guattari.



Guattari Reframed. Paul Elliott. IB Tauris. May 2012.

(http://www.amazon.co.uk/Guattari-Reframed-Interpreting-Thinkers-Contemporary/dp/178076233X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1350642707&sr=8-1)
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Guattari Reframed is part of the *Contemporary Thinkers Reframed Series*, which makes great figures in social thought accessible to an undergraduate public. Félix Guattari (1930-1992) was a French psychoanalyst and activist that founded and worked at La Borde clinic as a psychiatrist. He developed most of his published work hand in hand with philosopher Gilles Deleuze, a key figure in radical Marxism and postmodernism. Paul Elliott's introduction swifts through Guattari's life and work, carefully avoiding his controversial political activism that involved taking into refuge revolutionaries such as Bifo, Antonio Negri or Klaus Croissant, the Red Army's lawyer.

Elliott puts together a powerful and complex piece of work, which offers a tasting rather than a full menu of Guattari's conceptual contributions. The volume includes an excellent glossary that will help more than one dissertation, an exhaustive and up to date bibliography, and a suggestive filmography, which gathers the examples used throughout.

The first section accounts for Guattari's critique of his professional, cultural and political environment. In Chapter 2 Elliott draws from Deleuze and Guattari's most popular works, the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and introduces the concepts of the molar and the molecular. Elliott finds their roots in Guattari's previous solo essay on Balthus' paintings, *Cracks in the street*. Both concepts deal with the aesthetic experience: The molar names the institutional knowledge that the viewer acquires in her personal educational background, while the molecular is the *ego* feeling one gets when strolling through a museum or sitting in a dark movie theatre. Most importantly, these two experiential dimensions interact constantly, in a dynamic process that pushes through the micro-macro debate between structuralism and phenomenology. Elliot follows up with an example extracted from Cameron's film *Avatar*. He puts forward

the plurality of experiences that a single viewer might have while watching the film, which can take place not only at an ideological level- the film has been conventionalized as a neoliberal metaphor- but also at a perceptual, let's say epidermic level- the emotions shaped by the colours movement and the overall 3D experience. As Deleuze and Guattari say "There is no question... of establishing a dualist opposition between the molar and the molecular that would be no better than the dualism between the One and the multiple".

The search for a performative explanation of the aesthetic experience continues in chapter 6, *Faciality*. Deleuze and Guattari's main corpus strongly influenced the post-modernist perspective in the 1970's academic world. Elliot connects *A Thousand Plateaus* to Guattari's essay *Concrete Machines* and explains how the individual face is both a source for the expression of subjectivity and a tool for communication. With communication comes discrimination: Elliot includes Zizek's analysis of Chaplin's facial expression in *Citylights*. This example illustrates beautifully the authors' *tour the force* in analysing white supremacy "based not on otherness but `waves of sameness`, not on the simple binary but on a spectrum of difference that recognizes not exteriority, only faces that differ from the white one". Instead of the Us/Them divide, the concept is a continuation of the dictatorship of normality. Not surprisingly, an amused Michel Foucault propelled the *Anti-Oedipus* into a best-seller concluding in his preface that the objective of the book was "The tracking down of all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the pretty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives".

Precisely, in "Molecular revolution" the author moves towards political action. This outlines Guattari's personal *chaosophical* analysis of social change, broad in scope, since it integrated the aesthetic, ecological and embodied dimensions of social life. Guattari believed, together with Deleuze, Foucault and Sontag among others, in the liberating forces of 1968. He hoped for individual action to break down the reproduction of the established morality of capitalism. In essays such as "I have even met happy drag queens" Guattari finds inspiration in alternative behaviours from different areas of art and sexuality. The quest for singular lifestyles continued in his visit to Brazil in 1982, where he found examples of non-standardized expressions of desire. These encounters contributed to his concept of *becoming-homosexual*. Both in a metaphorical and literal sense, homosexuality is taken as a token for breaking the prevailing Cartesian polarity between good and bad, proper and improper, legitimate and deviant.

This is a book students will want to play with. Elliot follows Guattari's eclecticism and makes concepts more accessible. He mixes a specialized philosophical vocabulary with examples extracted from the arts, such as Hitchcock's films, John Lennon's "bagism" or Antonin Artaud's analysis of Van Gogh. The use of examples is imaginative, despite some of them being, to put it in psychoanalytical terms, more a projection of the author's interests than an illustration of Guattari's perspective on art and culture.

The attribution of authorship is always a complicated matter, but ultimately Elliott succeeds in bringing Guattari out of the Deleuzian cave. The result is an informative and attractive little book, which grounds key concepts for the analysis of our cultural world.

Read more from the IB Tauris Reframed Series. (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/?s=reframed+tauris>)

Dafne Muntanyola-Saura has a Ph.D. in Sociology from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (2008), where she is currently teaching Cultural Consumption and Ethnography. She has been an MA student at Stockholm University, and a postdoc researcher in Nice and Madrid, as well as Fulbright Scholar at University of California, San Diego (UCSD). She is part of the interdisciplinary project Dance and Cognition, with the Wayne McGregor-Random Dance company and professor David Kirsh from UCSD. She translated Cicourel (2007) and Kirsh (2007) into Spanish. Her current research crosses over the fields of contemporary cognitive science (embodied / distributed cognition) and video-aided ethnography (Muntanyola, 2012, & Kirsh, 2010). She studies expert and creative teams in different work environments, such as hospitals, TV sets, dance and swimming. You can also see her academia.edu profile

(<http://uab.academia.edu/DafneMuntanyola>). Read reviews by Dafne
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